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SUBJECT: U.S. ELECTION DAY IN KENYA

¶1. Summary. Kenyans see President-elect Barack Obama as their "favorite son," and are delighted by his election. The Ambassador hosted an early morning November 5 event attended by over 2,000 Kenyans to watch the results, and issued a statement highlighting the transparent and peaceful nature of the process (text para 8). The event was covered live by the Kenyan media. Virtually all commentators and editorials have emphasized the transparent and orderly nature of the U.S. elections as a lesson that Kenyans must take to heart as the country moves ahead with fundamental electoral reform. End summary.

¶2. President-elect Obama is seen as Kenya's favorite son (since his father was from Kenya, and there are Obama family members here), and there was enormous interest in the U.S. electoral process. The campaign, starting with the primaries, was intensively covered by all the Kenyan media. Without knowing better, one could have imagined that the election was taking place here. During the weeks leading up to Election Day the major papers were dominated by stories about the presidential campaign.

¶3. The Ambassador hosted a large event beginning at 5 am on November 5 to watch the U.S. election results. Over 2,000 Kenyans attended, many of them specially invited students from dozens of high schools and universities. (During the months preceding the election, Mission speakers reached directly over 6,000 high school and university students throughout the country to talk about the U.S. electoral process.) All those attending were astounded by how rapidly the election results were reported, and the final result known. In contrast, the reporting of the results in the December 27 Kenyan elections strung out over several days, with lack of transparency in the vote tallying process.

¶4. Kenyans were very impressed by Republican candidate McCain's gracious concession speech and, in essence, by the general civility of the entire U.S. electoral process. The entire event at the residence was broadcast live by all the major media. In a very real sense, all Kenya watched the results and witnessed the democratic process with us. Kenyans across the political, social, and ethnic spectrum have expressed appreciation for us having hosted such a public event, and many noted how educational it was for the next generation of voters.

¶5. The other main center of attention in Kenya on election day was the Nyanza province homestead of "Granny Sarah," who raised Obama's father. Obama's half-sister Auma and other family members were gathered there to watch the results. There was extensive international media coverage at the homestead. The Kenyan government provided appropriate security.

¶6. As Kenyans watched the electoral returns come in, the atmosphere was electric. Once the results were known, Kenyans quickly started celebrating the election of President-elect Obama. President Kibaki declared November 6 a national holiday in honor of Obama's victory.

On November 6 various prayer meetings were convened all over the country to pray for the President-elect (from Nairobi to the coast to Nyanza in the west). Many matatu public transportation vans flew American flags. Prime Minister Odinga issued a statement from China, where he was attending an international conference, and Vice President Musyoka came by the Ambassador's election results watching event to offer congratulations. The Kenyan media is giving extensive coverage to the transition underway in the U.S., citing it as an example Kenyans should emulate.

¶7. Virtually all commentaries and editorials have emphasized that Kenyans must take to heart the lessons of the transparent, accountable, and peaceful nature of the U.S. election. All have pointed out that Kenyans should absorb these lessons in order to carry out the fundamental electoral reforms envisaged in the national coalition accord. (Electoral reform is moving forward in the Parliament, and the U.S. electoral process is having a positive impact.)

¶8. Begin Text of Ambassador's remarks. We welcome the exceptional interest and enthusiasm manifested by the Kenyan people in the U.S. electoral process. The strong and growing partnership between the United States and Kenya is in fact based on shared democratic values. The U.S. electoral process reflected key elements of a strong democratic process. The political campaign was characterized by open and frank discussion, including through debates. The campaign was focused on issues. The electoral process involved all Americans in a way reflecting the diversity that is one of the great strengths of the United States. The process was peaceful, and voting was conducted in a manner to ensure transparency and

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accountability. Finally, the constitution and rule of law ensure that the will of the majority will be respected, while ensuring that the rights of all will be protected. We value the friendship of the Kenyan people, and assure them that the United States will continue to stand by their side as they work to implement fundamental reforms in order to strengthen democratic institutions and the well-being of all Kenyans. End text.  
RANNEBERGER